

On the Path to the European Union (November 19, 1981)

Abstract

This draft of the so-called Single European Act, which Federal Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher introduced to the European Parliament, aimed to revitalize and deepen European integration. Among other things, Genscher proposes closer cooperation in the form of a European Union, a greater role for majority decisions, and an expansion of authority.

Source

Speech by Federal Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher to the European Parliament on the Further Development of the European Community

[...]

The Federal German Government has formulated its initiative in coordination with the Italian Government. The draft European Act has been submitted in the form of a joint German-Italian proposal to the governments of the other Member States, to the President of this House and to the President of the Commission of the European Communities.

We hope that this initiative will receive the active support of the European Parliament which, in the opinion of the Federal German Government, has a central role to play in progress towards European Union. I would therefore ask you to give it your support.

The European Community is now in the most economically difficult situation since it was founded. The real national product is expected to fall this year by some 0.5%, inflation will rise to something like 11.5% and the number of people unemployed reached the 9 million level in July and is still rising. Of those 9 million unemployed, 4 million are less than 25 years of age. In 1980, the Community had a foreign trade deficit of almost 120 DM thousand million, and our deficit with our main industrial competitors, the USA and Japan, was 45 DM thousand million and 20 DM thousand million respectively. There can be no doubt whatsoever that our countries will only be able to survive this major economic challenge by standing together.

Madam President, the economic problems we are facing now strike at the very economic root of the European Community and of our democratic systems. But despite this, we must not concentrate our efforts exclusively on economic issues. We must set our sights on the great goal of the political unification of Europe, because it is from this goal that we shall derive the strength to act in a spirit of solidarity and to take decisions—including economic decisions—which amount to more than just make-do-and-mend, but which are genuinely forward-looking solutions—in other words, decisions which do not get stuck in the kind of national self-seeking of which we are all guilty, my own country included. We must find a dynamic way to take us out of and beyond the crisis.

[...]

Our initiative is based on three main elements. Firstly, it is intended to give prominence to the general political aim of European unification in the eyes of all of us. European activity takes place in five main areas: the European Economic Community in Brussels, European political cooperation, the European Council, the European Parliament and the European Court of Justice.

Once completed, European Union will become a special kind of entity not covered by the traditional concepts of the federal State or the confederation of States. The European Act we are now proposing therefore sets out to formulate the aim of European Union for this many-faceted process of the unification of European activities. It is intended that the Member States commit themselves to this goal in the form of a declaration of major political importance.

Secondly, the European Act is intended as a general framework for the five main institutional spheres of cooperation. Our aim here is to consolidate what has already been achieved, to formalize and ratify unwritten practices in the sphere of cooperation and to give an impetus for the further development of what already exists; last but not least, we want to improve the coherence of the institutions mutual relations.

The Act therefore comprises proposals on such things as extending European political cooperation, and it also calls for the decision-making structures of the European Community and of European political cooperation to be consolidated under the aegis of the European Council. To ensure that Europe remains externally viable, it is essential that European political cooperation foreign policy and European Community external economic policy be integrated into a coherent and comprehensive European policy.

We attach special importance to greatly improving cooperation and the dialogue between the European Parliament, the European Community, European political cooperation and the European Council, as well as to strengthening Parliament's participation and watchdog functions. We have therefore taken up a number of Parliament's demands and have tried to go along with them to the extent to which that is possible without amending the Treaties. What is at issue here is the democratic legitimacy of the Community. A strong Parliament is a powerhouse for European unification and a centre of European consciousness.

I should like to add on behalf of the Federal German Government that we are hoping for additional suggestions from the European Parliament in precisely this sphere, and we shall be pleased to take any such suggestions into account in the deliberations of the Council of Ministers. Another important aim is to improve the decision-making processes in Europe.

In particular, we have advocated making the majority decisions provided for in the Treaties in the Councils of Ministers the rule once again and relegating the appeal to 'vital interests' to an exception to this rule.

Thirdly, the aim of everything I have discussed so far is to consolidate what has already been achieved in the process of European unification and to exploit to the full the inherent opportunities for further development. It is also intended to give some impetus towards including important new sectors in European cooperation. For instance, foreign policy cooperation should include questions of security policy. It is particularly important at this time for the voice of Europe to be heard more clearly.

We realize that we must proceed with caution in this particular area. But we believe the inclusion of the political and economic dimensions of European security in the nascent common foreign policy to be absolutely indispensable. What we mean by this is firstly, point analysis of global and regional factors endangering the security of the Community; secondly, the development of active global policies on the part of the Ten designed to counter such dangers and to help guarantee the economic security of the Community and our supplies of energy and raw materials; thirdly, improving the ability of the Ten to coordinate their response with others to crises in the world in line with our common interests; fourthly, finally and above all, the development of a constructive, pan-European policy on the part of the Ten which, despite the division of our continent into two power blocks, will lead—via dialogue and cooperation, confidence-building, arms control and disarmament to an agreed level of stability on the basis of a balance of power—to a European peace for which it will be the job of that policy of ours to

develop the political and economic dimensions.

[...]

Source of English translation: Sitting of November 19, 1981, *Official Journal of the European Communities*, No. 1-277 [English edition] *Debates of the European Parliament. 1981-1982 Session. Report of Proceedings from 16 to 20 November 1981*. Europe House, Strasbourg, pp. 216-17.

Source of original German speech: Rede des Bundesministers des Auswärtigen, Genscher, vor dem Europäischen Parlament über die Fortentwicklung der Europäischen Gemeinschaft am 19. November 1981, in *Bulletin* (Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung), 23. November 1981, Nr. 110, pp. 945-47; reprinted in Auswärtiges Amt, ed., *Außenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Dokumente von 1949 bis 1994*. Cologne, 1995, pp. 481-83.

Recommended Citation: On the Path to the European Union (November 19, 1981), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/two-germanies-1961-1989/ghdi:document-1067>> [July 02, 2025].